

# *Ambroise's Estoire de la Guerre Sainte and the development of a genre*

Article

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# Ambroise's *Estoire de la Guerre sainte* and the Developement of a Genre

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Predating by less than two decades the earliest prose chronicles, the accounts of the fourth crusade which have been the focus of much of Peter Noble's recent research, the *Estoire de la guerre sainte* is an eyewitness account of the Third Crusade, written towards the end of the twelfth century.<sup>1</sup> Before looking at what the chronicler, Ambroise, adds to the young and developing genre of vernacular chronicle let us consider the 'state of the art', the development of chronicle writing in Old French up to the time of Ambroise.

Before the Norman Conquest there was in England a tradition of writing history in the vernacular; the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* continued to be written into the twelfth century. This is probably why the earliest Old French chronicles are all Anglo-Norman rather than continental French. Gaimar, Wace, and Benoit de Saint-Maure, the earliest practitioners, all worked on pre-existing material; they were by and large re-writing Latin texts for a lay readership. Then in the 1170s Jordan Fantosme, clerk to the Bishop of Winchester, wrote his well-known chronicle about contemporary events, largely about the wars Henry II fought in the North of England and the rebellion of Henry the Young King.<sup>2</sup> This was something new. The models Fantosme and his predecessors had to work on, the established traditions for relating historical, or pseudo-historical, events, were, on the one hand, the Latin chronicles and, on the other, the Old French *Chansons de geste* which gave fictionalised accounts of history. R. C. Johnson, the editor of Fantosme's chronicle, examined and questioned the historicity of elements of the narration by drawing parallels with *chanson de geste* narrative.<sup>3</sup> More pertinently Philip Bennett has examined the language and structures of the chronicle in relation to the *chanson de geste* while at the same time highlighting the influence of the schools, particularly in the prologue.<sup>4</sup> This combination, drawing on both the Latin culture of learning and the

popular culture of the *chanson de geste* is something that is also found, but in different ways and different proportions, in Ambroise's text. There is no evidence that he knew Fantosme's chronicle – though he may have done – but he is certainly working from the same literary models.

Ambroise's *Estoire de la guerre sainte* was written shortly after the events it recounts and probably before the death of Richard I. For decades debate has raged over the status of, and relationship between, the *Estoire* and the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*.<sup>5</sup> This Latin text, probably compiled by the Augustinian Prior Richard de Templo, between 1217 and 1222, shares a considerable amount of material with Ambroise and many in the past considered that neither was in fact an eye-witness account but rather that both derived from a common source now lost. We now have a better understanding of the level of sophistication of some of the early chroniclers who, though eye-witnesses themselves, would also draw upon written sources. Helen Nicholson, in the introduction to her translation of the *Itinerarium*, argues convincingly that the Latin author drew on Ambroise's *Estoire*, but that they were both, in all probability, participants in the Crusade.

Ambroise has in the past generally been considered to have been a jongleur. He presents himself as a non-combatant on the Crusade and Gaston Paris, the first editor of the text, argued that the only non-combatants on such an expedition would be priests and *jongleurs*, and that Ambroise did not display sufficient learning to be a priest.<sup>6</sup> In fact the rhetorical structures used by Ambroise suggest a latinate education (see below). Paris goes on to describe his piety as only what might be expected from any pilgrim on crusade, but it is actually very deep-rooted; it shapes and informs his whole approach to his material.<sup>7</sup> The words used by Anthony Lodge with reference to Fantosme could equally be used about Ambroise

Jordan had recourse to a device widely used by medieval writers of history: the events narrated fall out as they do clearly in accordance with God's plan for the world.<sup>8</sup>

Direct evidence of Ambroise's identity can be found. In the records pertaining to the coronation in 1200 of Queen Isabella, wife of King John, a payment can be found to '*nobis clericis*' Eustace and Ambroise for singing at the coronation. Ambroise was not a common name

at the Norman Court. We have here a *clericus* at the royal court who is also a singer – and the Ambroise of our text shows signs of clerical training and a strong sense of rhythm and oral presentation. Moreover Ambroise tells us in the *Estoire* that he was present at Richard's coronation – so it seems quite likely that this is our Ambroise.<sup>9</sup> I suggest that we have here a writer who is more of a *clericus* than a *jongleur*.

Why does this matter? In recent years literary scholars have moved away from a positivist emphasis on the identity of the author to a more text-based approach. However, the identity of Ambroise matters because of the way Gaston Paris's assumption that he was a *jongleur* has prejudiced thinking about the text, leading to an emphasis on what the text shares with the *chanson de geste* and undervaluing the more learned aspects of Ambroise's discourse. It has been described as 'almost unique, occupying a transitional position between the fiction of the heroic *chansons de geste* and the prose narratives of men such as Villehardouin and Joinville' and 'une oeuvre ambigue par sa double nature épique et historique'.<sup>10</sup> While the *Estoire* is seen as part epic, Fantosme, writing in *laisses*, the generic marker of the *chanson de geste*, is generally described as a chronicler, albeit one who borrows from popular vernacular tradition; Antonia Gransden, for example, describes his chronicle as a text that 'resembles the *chanson de geste* and has romance features'.<sup>11</sup> The writing of history in the vernacular was still an unusual undertaking. The chroniclers who preceded Ambroise, including Fantosme, were clerically trained.<sup>12</sup> Ambroise would have had the same training and the same models as his predecessors – what is different is how he exploits these models.

Before we look at the evidence of Latinate learning in Ambroise's text let us then turn to the influence of the *chanson de geste*. As Bennett has shown the *chansons de geste* had input into the development of vernacular chronicles from the beginning<sup>13</sup> – and Ambroise is no exception. There are several direct references to the *chanson de geste*. Messina is described as being situated at the extreme point of Sicily 'across the straits from Reggio, which Agoland took in his expedition' (ll. 5115–16); Agoland is a Saracen king who invades Calabria in the *Chanson d'Aspremont*.

Geoffrey of Lusignan is compared to Roland and Oliver (ll. 4658–60). Richard is compared with the heroes of Roncevaux when he is praised for the deeds he had carried out (ll. 11175–78). There is a similar reference in Fantosme who describes Henry II

as 'The most honourable and most victorious king who ever was anywhere on earth since the time of Moses, save only Charlemagne, whose might was immense through the deeds of the twelve peers amongst whom were Oliver and Roland' (ll. 111-14). Later Ambroise rather turns this topos round to show up the crusaders in comparison to Charlemagne:

When the valiant King Charlemagne, who conquered so many lands and countries, went to campaign in Spain, taking with him the noble band who were sold to Marsile by Ganelon to the dishonour of France, and when he, Charlemagne, had returned to Saxony, where he did many great deeds and defeated Guiteclin, bringing about the fall of the Saxons by the strength of many valiant men and when he led his army to Rome, when Agoland, through a great undertaking, had arrived at Reggio in the rich land of Calabria, when in another war Syria was lost and reconquered and Antioch besieged, in the great armies and the battles against the Turks and the pagan hordes, when many were killed and conquered, there was no bickering and quarreling, at that time and before; then there was neither Norman nor French, nor Poitevin...there was no malicious gossip nor insulting of one another; everyone came back with all honour ...

Here we have reference to the *Chanson de Roland*, the *Chanson d'Aspremont*, the *Chanson des Saisnes* – and possibly also to the *Chanson d'Antioche*.

The *Chanson d'Aspremont* is alluded to on four occasions in total (Paris p.ix). Ambroise also refers to Alexander (l. 2848, l. 4173), Hector (l. 2850) and Achilles (l. 2850) and to Paris and Helen of Troy (l. 4177) – all of whom figured in both the vernacular and the Latin literary tradition of the twelfth century – as well as to the vernacular tale of Tristan (l. 4176).

Less direct is the way Ambroise presents his central characters as heroes, as though heroes of the *chanson de geste*.<sup>14</sup> This is particularly true of the presentation of Richard I.<sup>15</sup> From the beginning Richard is the focus of the account, even although his father is still alive when Richard takes up the cross. He is described throughout with such epithets as 'the great', 'the noble', 'the valiant' – as well as the lion-heart. He rides a horse called Fauvel, which he captures from

the emperor of Cyprus: this subtly evokes the *chanson de geste* heroes as Fauvel is a common name for a horse in the *chanson de geste*. More importantly he seems to share some of the characteristics of the best known of all Old French epic heroes, Roland. Richard is a little headstrong; he takes personal risks for which others rebuke him. Saladin describes him as 'one who rushes into things foolishly' (l. 12114); but this is expressed as a qualification to the praise that 'the king has great valour and boldness' (l. 12113). Saladin continues with a phrase which again recalls the epic – in fact explicitly recalls the *Chanson de Roland*, as he questions the value of heroism without moderation, 'I would prefer to exercise generosity and judgement with moderation than boldness without moderation' (ll. 12116–118). This can be compared to Oliver's advice to Roland in the *Chanson de Roland*: 'For a true vassal's act, in its wisdom, avoids folly; caution is better than great zeal. Franks are dead because of your recklessness; Charles will never again receive our service' (ll. 1724–27).<sup>16</sup> Richard is even rebuked for his recklessness by his own men (ll. 7135–55).

In a slightly later incident Richard replies to his men trying to limit his activities that, 'I sent them here and asked them to go, if they die there without me then would I never again bear the title of king' (ll. 7332–35). Here we see that Richard could be reckless, but also that he enjoyed the special protection of God – and that his recklessness is also in a sense part of his commitment – the justification of the foolhardiness is put into the mouth of the king himself and he is shown to be a good guarantor of his men. In this way Ambroise uses his knowledge of how heroes are presented in the *chanson de geste* as part of the way he presents his hero.

Bancourt argues that his presentation of the enemy Saracens also owes a great deal to the *chanson de geste* tradition. However, the military historian Matthew Bennett has shown the presentation of Saracens in the *chanson de geste* is in many ways not dissimilar to their presentation in some contemporary Latin chronicles, such as the *Gesta Francorum*, so perhaps we are making a false distinction if we expect the chronicle tradition to differ radically from that of the *chanson de geste*.<sup>17</sup>

It is clear then that the moulding of the material, the presentation of the 'heroes' and of the enemy may owe something to the popular vernacular tradition of the *chanson de geste*, though in a way that is not discordant with conventional Latin chronicles – but what then of the structure and language of the text?

We expect chronicles to be written in fairly straightforward chronological order, and to some extent this is what we find in Ambroise; but in some respects his narrative sequence is more complex than this. Within a framework of a prologue and epilogue, quite normal for a piece of historical writing,<sup>18</sup> the broad structure is indeed chronological – the diegetic sequence is the same as the narrative order. It begins with members of the royal house taking up the cross in 1187, proceeds by following the footsteps of Richard I to the end of his crusade and his departure from the Holy Land. However, part way into the narrative there is an extensive analepse in the form of an explanatory flashback. When the poet reaches the point in his narration where the kings of England and France, Richard I and Philip Augustus, have arrived at the siege of Acre he signals the need for the reader to understand the background of the situation:

Now let us leave this for the moment (for he who bears with me a while will hear me return to it when the material lends itself to this); let us move on from the two kings and their arrival, about which I have said enough to bring them to Acre. Listen and pay attention, for I am going to break off my thread and interrupt the matter, but it will be picked up again and re-attached later. For the kings came last to the siege, not first. So Ambroise wants to tell and instruct those who wish to learn how it came about that the city of Acre was besieged. He did not see any of this and knows only what he has read. Now you will hear what men took part and how bold was the undertaking. (ll. 2382–2410)

Here we have a poet of relatively sophisticated historical sense, relating not only events, but what lay behind them. He picks up his metaphor of breaking the thread when he reaches the chronological point at which he had broken off:

But I must follow the story and rejoin the material to tell of the siege of Acre; so AMBROISE wishes to complete his tale here, charge on to his goal, re-tie the knot and join the tale of the two kings who came to the siege of Acre and what they did there and recall what he can remember of the story of how Acre was taken, as he saw it with his own eyes. (ll. 45551–62)

The analepse is necessary to understand the significance of the fall of Acre. Ambroise makes it clear that he is here relating events of which he has no direct experience. Within this long explanatory flashback Ambroise again goes outside the diegetic sequence with two series of sylleptic anecdotes. The first series relates tales of heroism and the protection of God and is introduced as such, while the choice of material shows that he intends to entertain as well as to instruct. There is, for example, the tale of a knight caught 'with his trousers down' relieving himself – and how he escapes (ll. 3578–3619). Throughout this sequence the same two lines are used to begin each of the anecdotes (see illustration below):

Issi com li tens avenieient,  
E plusors choses avenieient.

*Time passed and many an incident happened.*

This repetition recalls the use of formulaic repetition and the structuring of *laisse parallèles* characteristic of the *chanson de geste*. The second set of sylleptic anecdotes stresses the suffering of the ordinary soldiers in the siege – and puts the blame on one of the local leaders, the Marquis of Montferrat. Here the last two lines of each anecdote are the same:

4221 Qu'il maldiseient le marchis  
4222 Par qu[i] il esteient si aquis.

*They cursed the marquis, who brought them to this sorry pass.*

Again the repetition recalls the parallelism of the *chanson de geste*. But Ambroise is not writing in *laisses* nor are there any parallels outside the two opening or closing lines. What is really significant here is the way the structure cuts these anecdotes off from the rest of the narration and indicates a common link between them. Separating these tales from the rest of the text may be an indication that these anecdotes, not witnessed by Ambroise, are to be read differently: that they contain a different kind of truth.

The scribe copying the manuscript has highlighted the structure by using a large capital letter at the beginning of the series of anecdotes and a paragraph marker at the beginning of each anecdote (see illustration next page).



This is not dissimilar to how a scribe might lay out a *chanson de geste* with a large capital at the beginning of a *laisse*. In the use of the paragraph marker, however, it resembles rather the lay-out of a romance. Here we notice a major difference between Ambrose's

S	i mar li pur ceus de demont	A	i char la convenant queire
Q	uont sus adex e al amont	I	celle mesmes periere
S	i un li cuens de chalois	F	en un home el dol de riere
Q	uier foz home chalz elons	D	une colupne de marbre
S	i ambreit tant altre plome	E	li home deuenst arbre
Q	uist n'en solz come nelome	S	iust ele p'm colpee
E	chant acte en la demuree	T	aur istid ele dreir acopée
E	la preste gant henoree	E	li prodom ne la stur
I	selon poi son calugement	C	ar dampnele nel g'stuz
E	porapoz des purement	E	en tel signoz dore l'omière
A	unt meime g'it auenté	Q	tel miracle fuit acetre
Q	l'om reunt p'elpture	V	si com li tens auenerent
E	meint miracle i auenté	E	plusor chofel auenerent
Q	des iduz des nenent	E	nire aural emai enconchange
E	nlost auent meime periere	A	unt vne auenture estrange
I	dist gent deuant e deriere	E	nlost dun serant li ostent
A	loant souent z uenient	K	i el m' fosse del mur feston
E	m'el chofel auenerent	A	vmez deoste z de haub
Q	a miracle erent reuues	E	de ppoint ameine bel mert
Q	nt' el' erent auentés	V	n'el'ent al creatur
I	i auent dedenz l'ame	T	enere une arblastre amur
T	o d'it testorie en uerite	A	i serant trant p'ime archiere
A	ut perieres si bien reamés	S	i feri el piz de lor la chere
Q	ame neunt ten de celel rames	L	e ppoint la comphe faula
B	ne en ior si ieresselle	S	i q' otre l'oubé passa
Q	uop chet damneresse	L	i serant or al col un brief
Q	nul depeoir tote uies	A	eti des qu'il garda de g'et
H	ez perieres z noz cerclies	K	ar si non des el'it ierent
C	ar ele geotz les pieres celel	C	o uient co q'u illocerent
B	olanz come seles eussent eler	Q	g'it li g'rest vucha
Q	de gent couenant ametre	Q	ul resdon e prestucha
E	n la fonde sulone la terre	E	ist f'et deus q' p'm garde
O	g'it la pierre descendu	E	ut nat de nulle rien garde
E	la fonde aul la renten	V	si com li tens auenerent
Q	bien plan p'e p'sont enerte	E	plusor chofel auenerent
		I	i auent a hof des eust

structure and that of Fantosme. For Fantosme the base unit of composition is, arguably, the hemistich, and he writes in *laisses*, rather like the *chanson de geste*. Ambroise, on the other hand, does not actually turn his paragraphs into *laisses* – he continues to write in rhyming couplets.

Turning from structure to language we can pick out features that come from both the vernacular *chanson de geste* tradition and from the more learned scholastic tradition. In his study of *chanson de geste* elements in Fantosme Bennett looks first at oralising elements.<sup>19</sup> Of these the clearest is the use of apostrophe – not unusual in Old French literature as nearly all our earliest texts were performative. What we find in Fantosme is very close to the pattern of the *chanson de geste* in which the audience is typically encouraged to 'listen': 'oyez'. In Ambroise we are not instructed to listen, but told that 'there we might have seen' or 'there we might have heard'. Ambroise also tells us he is telling the truth – and re-inforces this by admitting when he does not know something. Fantosme similarly asserts that he is telling the truth, and does on one occasion tell us when he did not personally witness the events he is recounting. Peter Damian-Grint, in his study of early vernacular historiography, sees this determined insistence that the truth is being told as a characteristic of the developing discourse of historical writing.<sup>20</sup> It is not unknown in other genres, where often we are told that this is the true version of the story and any jongleur who tells you a different version is not telling the truth. But there the appeal is to what might be termed 'relative truth' – one version being better than another. In historical literature we are looking more at absolute truth: this is a factually true account of events.

Most striking in Ambroise's language is a notable lack of formulaic expression – although we do find the use of single epithets – similar to the sort of phrase we might find in the *chanson de geste*, though these are not repeated: 'Li cuens de Peiters li vallanz' (the valiant Count of Poitiers; l. 59); 'Guion le poigneur' (Gui the warrior; l. 2085).

The use of formulaic discourse is another distinguishing feature of the *chanson de geste*, and a feature that Fantosme does not neglect to exploit.<sup>21</sup> In Ambroise we find instead extensive use of scholarly rhetoric. A key point here (and one of the ways in which Sarah Kay distinguished 'rhetorique scolaire' from 'rhetorique populaire') is that Ambroise sometimes seems to indulge in rhetorical devices for

their own sake. In the following example given he is being witty for the sake of wit:

Si fu Guillemes de l'Estanc,  
Qui ot un cheval estanc (ll. 1398–99)

*There was William de l'Estanc, on an exhausted horse.*

Most characters are presented by Ambroise with a brief two line introduction; here he just takes advantage of the name of the knight to make a pun (one I was unable to render with a pun in the translation). The exigencies of rhyme obviously play a large role in the choice of words, yet Ambroise also conveys enjoyment of language in such descriptions. The following example could be seen as rhetoric for its own sake or as serving the narrative as Ambroise wants to stress the ferocity of the assault:

1482 En la vile de Limeçon,  
Ou mut l'assalt e la tençon,  
N'aveit remis huis ne fenestre,  
Ne riens que nuisance puisse estre,  
Tone ne tunel, escu ne targe,  
Ne vielz galee, ne vielz barge,  
1488 Ne fust, ne planche, ne **degré**,  
Qu'il i apportoient **de gré** ...

*In the town of Limassol, where the battle and fighting began, they had left intact nothing which could be used as a weapon: neither door nor window, barrel nor cask, round shields nor long shield, old galley nor old boats, plan nor beam, nor step.*

This example uses the accumulation of objects to stress the ferocity of the assault, while at the same time taking the opportunity to play with the rhyme in *adnominatio*.

Ambroise's most effective use of punning *annominatio* is perhaps in his treatment of the Emperor of Cyprus. Ambroise puns on *empereor* (emperor) and *empirer* (to make worse):

Issi se fist empereür –  
Nel fist pas – mais empireür,  
Car sei meïsmes empeirot

Onques qu'il peüst ne finot  
 1396 De mal feire e porchacer  
 [1400] E des cristiens Deu chacier.

*So he had made himself emperor, not truly imperial but imperilor, for he did much harm. He never ceased to commit evil and pursue evil ends, as far as he was able, and to pursue the Christians of God.*

He creates a neologism to characterise the emperor as someone whose essence is to cause harm. Here the rhetoric is used for propaganda purposes – but there is also a wit to be admired in the way he does it.

His use of simile is not particularly sophisticated – but can be effective. The image of Richard, so pierced with arrows that he resembles a hedgehog, is hyperbolic and conveys the sense of his heroic battle. Some similes are, however, not so apt. The following example from early in the text describes the effect of the arrival of the king of England:

722 Lors leisserent le manascr  
 Li Lungebard tresque il le virent,  
 S'en tornerent, si s'en fuïrent,  
 E li pruz reis lur cor[u] sure.  
 Si vut Ambroise a icel hore  
 Que quant cil le virent venir,  
 K'adonc vos peüst sovenir  
 De berbíz qui fuient a lou.  
 Ausi com boef traient al jou  
 Traient sus vers la posterne  
 Qui est de la devers Palerne.

*The Lombards left off their threats as soon as they saw him and turned and fled and the noble king pursued them. Ambroise witnessed this when it happened, for when they saw the king come they would have reminded you of sheep fleeing the wolf; as the oxen strain against the yoke so did they strain to reach the postern on the Palermo side.*

The second simile of the oxen straining against the yoke does not work as an image, but it provides an opportunity for punning word-play with *traire*, and this punning seems to be more important

to him than the image. Such contrived word-play is part of the craftsmanship on show.

His most extensive 'set-piece' of rhetoric is placed in the mouth of a priest, persuading Richard to stay in the Holy Land, despite disturbing news of his brother John's behaviour in England:

- Cil li dist, 'Sire, l'em vos blame,  
 E par cest ost vait la fame  
 9564 Partut de vostre retornee [...]  
 Reis, remembre tei des granz honors,  
 Que Deus t[ë] at en tanz lius faits,  
 Qui serunt mes tozjorz retraites,  
 9572 Que onques a rei de ton eage  
 Ne fist a mains de damage.  
 Reis, recorde tei que l'en conte, *annominatio*  
 [9600] Quant jo te vi de Peifiers conte  
 9576 C'onques [n'ot] nul si esveisie  
 Veisin ne si halt ne si preisie,  
 Si de guere te venist sus, *antithesis*  
 Que ne l'allasses en desus.  
 9580 Reis, remembre des granz tençons [...]  
 9584 Reis, remembre tei de l'aventure  
 De la riche descomfiture,  
 De Haltfort [...]  
 9590 Reis, remembre tei de ton realme  
 Que sanz porter escu ne hiaume  
 9592 Eüs en pais e en quité,  
 Que nuls n'i avait abité.  
 Reis, remembre tei de granz  
 emprises *polyptoton*  
 De tantes genz que as prises,  
 9596 De Meschines que tu preïs,  
 Des prüesces que tu feïs  
 Quant tu matas la grifonaille,  
 Qui te quidot prendre en bataille,  
 9600 Dont Dampnedeus te delivra, *polyptoton/antithesis*  
 E els a grant honte livra.  
 Reis, remembre tei de la prüesce,  
 Dont Deus t'estendi sa largesce,  
 9604 Que tu feïs de Cypre prendre *polyptoton*

- Ço que nuls hom valeit enprendre,  
 K[ë] en quinze jorz eüs prise, *polyptoton*  
 Fors que de Deu [ne] vint l'emprise,  
 9608 E que l'empereür prison *polyptoton*  
 Preïs e meis en prison.  
 Reis, garde tei qu'engin ne te fiere. *polyptoton*  
 Menbre tei de la grant nef fiere  
 9612 Quë en Acre ne pot entrer [...]  
 9617 Reis, remembre tei tantes feiees  
 Deus t'ad soliegié e soliege.  
 Reis, remembre tei de Acre e del siege,  
 9620 Ou tu venis a tens al prendre, *polyptoton*  
 Ou Deus te fist del tuen desprendre *anaphora*  
 Tant que la citié fud rendue.  
 Bons reis, don n'as tu entendue  
 9624 L'espargne de la maladie  
 Quë au siegë [ert] l'ennaudie,  
 Dont li autre prince mureient, *anaphora*  
 Dont nuls mires nes sucureient?  
 9628 Reis, remembre tei, e si garde *polyptoton*  
 La terre dont Deus t'at fait garde,  
 Ke tote sor tei l'atorna, *polyptoton*  
 Quant l'autre rei s'en torna.  
 9632 Reis, menbre tei des cristiëns  
 Que tu getas hors des liens[...]  
 9637 Reis, bien deüsses retenir  
 Que Deus t'at fait tantes bontez  
 Dont tu ies en tel pris montez  
 9640 Que tu ne criems rei ne baron.  
 Reis, car te menbre del Daron  
 Que tu preïs en quatre jorz.  
 Onc n'i fud plus longs tis sujorz.  
 9644 Reis, remembre tei de la grant presse  
 Ou tu fus de la gent engresse  
 Quant tu t'en dormis par pechié.  
 Menbre tei, reis bien [en]techié,  
 9648 Cum Deus t'en ot tost delivré. *polyptoton/antithesis*  
 Or sumes tuit a mort livré,  
 Or dient tuit, grant e menor, *antithesis*  
 Cil qui voleient vostre enor, *f.71rb*

9652 Que vos soliez estres peres  
 De la cristienté, e freres,  
 E s'or la leissiez sanz aïe  
 Donc est ele morte e traïe.'

*He said to him, 'My lord, you are criticised and throughout the army there is spreading the rumour of your return[...]*

*King, remember the great honour God has accorded you in many places, which will always be spoken off, for never has a king of your time suffered so little loss.*

*King, remember what was said of you when I saw you as count of Poitiers, that there was no neighbour, however bold, however great, however renowned that you would not defeat if he were to come in battle against you.*

*Remember the great quarrels [...]*

*Remember that great defeat [you inflicted] and the adventure of Hautefort [...].*

*Remember your kingdom, which you took over in peace and freely, as no-one else ever had, without bearing shield and helmet.*

*Remember your great undertakings, the people you have taken, Messina which you took, the deeds of valour which you accomplished when you defeated the Grifon, who thought to take you in battle, but God delivered you and gave them up to great shame.*

*Remember your valour at the taking of Cyprus, where God showed great generosity to you, when you took it in two weeks, when no-one had wanted to attempt this – apart from God the deed would have been impossible – and you took the emperor prisoner and put him in prison. King, take care you are not deceived.*

*Remember the great noble ship, which was unable to enter Acre [...].*

*Remember how many times God had comforted you and comforts you still.*

*Remember Acre and the siege in which you finally took [the town], where God caused you to expend your resources until the city surrendered. Good king, did you not understand why you were spared the illness during the siege, the arnaldia which killed the other princes, whom no doctor could help?*

*King, remember and take good care of the land of which God has made you guardian, for he entrusted everything to you when the other king left.*

*Remember the Christians whom you released from bondage at Darum  
[...]*

*King, you should well remember all God's goodness to you which has  
brought you such renown that you fear no king nor baron.*

*King remember Darum, which you took in four days – it took you no  
longer.*

*Remember when you were in a great crowd of the infidel race, when  
you had through sin fallen asleep, remember, gifted king, how God  
speedily delivered you. Now are we all given over to death. Now  
everyone, great and small, everyone who wished to honour you all  
say that you were always the father and the brother of Christianity  
and that if you leave her without help now then is she dead and  
betrayed'.*

This is in some ways a *mise-en-abyme* of the whole narrative: the narrative being repeated within the text, structured and presented for Richard, and, therefore, also for the reader, as the work of God, protecting and prospering Richard's crusade. The narration itself is economic, summarising much of what has gone before, and giving only a few lines to events narrated extensively earlier; yet Ambroise still manages to embellish the account with his favourite devices. If we take a moment to look at the passage we find that there are in particular a number of homophonic and homonymic rhymes, some using punning (ll. 9575–6), a large number depending on words from the same root (*polyptoton*: ll. 9595–96, 9604–5, 9606–7, 9608–9) while others depend on antithesis (ll. 9578–79, 9600–1, 9648–49). Each successive 'reis, menbre ...' reminds the reader of what has gone before. The direct speech invites the reader to listen, with the king in the text, and to be persuaded that this is the right course of action. Interestingly, the manuscript again indicates the structure at this point. The whole section begins with a two-line initial and goes on uninterrupted to the end of the priest's speech; then, the next section again has a two-line initial.

There is no doubt that this speech is a literary construct. Direct speech was often used in chronicles, not as a verbatim report of what a particular character said, but as a dramatic and rhetorical device to enliven the bald narrative. Sophie Marnette in her analysis of different forms of discourse, direct and indirect, in the chronicle and the *chanson de geste*, indicates a number of differences between the genres, first of all in proportion – a smaller proportion of the text



will be direct discourse in chronicles – and secondly in the nature of the direct discourse. For Marnette the direct discourse of the chronicle is secondary to the action, while in the *chansons de geste* it is action. This distinction is more valid for prose chronicle than it is for verse chronicle where a higher proportion of direct discourse is found. Nonetheless it remains of a different nature to the direct discourse of the *chanson de geste*; this speech – by far the longest in Ambroise's text – is a rhetorical set-piece. It does not purport to be the exact words of the priest – no-one would consider it to be so. Even supposing a priest did harangue Richard in such a way it would not have been in highly rhetorical rhyming couplets, and it is highly unlikely that a reporting chronicler would have overheard the harangue. What we see here in the use of language is something we might find in a piece of scholastic writing in Latin, but which we would not find in a *chanson de geste*. Nor do we find anything similar in Fantosme.

## Conclusion

What we find overall is that the *chanson de geste* input in the language of Ambroise's text is minimal. There is some influence in the moulding of the material – the presentation of hero and of enemy, and in the parallelism and the structuring of the anecdotes – but it is very thoroughly adapted to suit Ambroise's purpose. His narrative is shaped not by the need to tell a heroic story, but the need to tell God's story. Unlike both Fantosme and Wace, Ambroise does not use the basic structures of the *laisse* to tell his tale, but prefers the straightforward rhyming couplet, the normal form for any other story apart from the *chanson de geste*. The language he uses shares much more with the Latin chronicle, or the romances of such clerical writers as Chretien de Troyes, than it does with the *chanson de geste*. The epic has been stressed in analyses of Ambroise's work and the learned played down. It is time for that to be reversed and the real influence of more learned discourse to be highlighted. This is at least in part what Ambroise contributed to the development of the genre. It is possible to argue that what Ambroise is doing here is very typical of Anglo-Norman literature.<sup>24</sup> Bennett sees a similar combination of learned and popular in his analysis of Fantosme, and I argue that the same combination is to be found in the Anglo-Norman *chanson de geste*, in particular in *Boeves de Hamtonne*, but

also in the Anglo-Norman version of *Fierabras*.<sup>25</sup> It is perhaps then not surprising that we find it in the work of this Norman chronicler at the Angevin court. In Ambroise the popular is more thoroughly adapted than it is in Fantosme. The vernacular verse chronicle was soon to be superseded by the prose chronicle – though some verse chronicles would continue to be written – but it is arguable that historical discourse attained its greatest riches in these texts from the latter part of the twelfth century: in Fantosme, with its *chanson de geste* formulae, its *laisse* and its admixture of more learned forms; and in Ambroise, in which the popular *chanson de geste* discourse is little more than an echo, thoroughly appropriated and at the service of the more learned polemic of this apologist for the Third Crusade.

## Notes

- 1 *The History of the Holy War: Ambroise's 'Estoire de la Guerre Sainte'*, ed. Marianne Ailes and Malcolm Barber, 2 vols, Boydell and Brewer, Woodbridge, 2003.
- 2 *Jordan Fantosme's Chronicle*, ed. R. C. Johnston, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981; on the focus of this chronicle see Anthony Lodge, 'Literature and History in the *Chronicle* of Jordan Fantosme', *French Studies* 44 (1990): 257–70.
- 3 R. C. Johnson, 'The Historicity of Jordan Fantosme', *Journal of Medieval History* 2 (1976): 159–168.
- 4 P. E. Bennett, 'La Chronique de Jordan Fantosme. Épique et public lettré au xii<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 40 (1997): 37–56.
- 5 *Chronicle of the Third Crusade; a translation of the Itinerarium Peregrinorum et gesta Regis Ricardi*, trans. Helen J. Nicholson, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1997; on the debate see Nicholson, *Chronicle*, pp. 12–15, cf. J. G. Edwards, 'The *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et gesta Regis Ricardi* and the *Estoire de la guerre sainte*', in *Historical Essays in honour of James Tait* ed. J. G. Edwards, V. H. Galbraith, E. F. J. Jacob, Manchester, printed for the subscribers, 1933, pp. 59–77.
- 6 Ambroise, *Estoire de la guerre sainte*, ed. Gaston Paris, Paris, Ministère de l'Instruction publique, 1897 (Collection de documents inédits sur l'histoire de France), p. vii.
- 7 Paris, pp. vii–viii; M. J. Ailes, 'Ambroise – a Godwitness account of the Third Crusade' paper given at the GCMS annual symposium, 2005.
- 8 Lodge, 'Literature and History', p. 262.

- 9 *The History of the Holy War* ed. Ailes and Barber, p. 2.
- 10 *The Crusade of Richard Lion Heart* by Ambroise, trans. M. J. Hubert and John L. Lamonte, New York, Octagon Books, 1974, p. 4; Paul Bancourt, 'De l'image épique à la représentation historique du musulman' in *L'Estoire de la guerre sainte*, in *Au Carrefour des routes de l'Europe: la chanson de geste*, Aix-en-Provence, Université de Provence, 1987, vol. I, p. 224.
- 11 Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c.550–c.1307*, London, Routledge, 1974, p. 237.
- 12 Wace and Fantosme were clerics; Gransden described Gaimar as 'probably a secular clerk of Norman extraction', *Historical Writing in England*, p. 209; see also P. E. Bennett, 'L'Épique dans l'historiographie anglo-normande: Gaimar, Wace, Jordan Fantosme', in *Aspects de l'épopée romane: mentalités, idéologies, intertextualités*, ed. Hans van Diek and W. Noomen, Groningue, Egbert Forsten, 1995, pp. 321–330 (321–22).
- 13 P. E. Bennett, 'L'Épique dans l'historiographie anglo-normande'.
- 14 M. J. Ailes 'Ambroise's Heroes of the Third Crusade', in *Writing War: Medieval Literary Responses to Warfare*, ed. Corinne Saunders, Françoise Le Saux and Neil Thomas, Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 2004, pp. 29–48.
- 15 *Ibid*, p. 38.
- 16 *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. Frederick Whitehead, revised T. Hemming, Bristol, Bristol Classical Press, 1993; *The Song of Roland*, trans. Glyn Burgess, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1990.
- 17 Bancourt, *Les Musulmans dans les chansons de geste du cycle du roi*, 2 vols, Aix-en-Provence, Université de Provence, 1982, pp. 230–35; *Idem*, 'De l'Image épique', *passim*. Matthew Bennett, 'First Crusaders Image of Muslims: the influence of vernacular poetry', *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 22 (1986): 101–22.
- 18 Antonia Gransden, 'Prologues in the Historiography of the Twelfth Century', *England in the Twelfth Century*, ed. W. Daniels, Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer, 1990, pp. 99–118; Peter Damian-Grint, *The New Historians of the Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 1999, pp. 87–142.
- 19 P. E. Bennett, 'La Chronique de Jordan Fantosme', p. 39; *idem*, 'L'Épique dans l'historiographie anglo-normande', p. 329.
- 20 Damian-Grint, *The new Historians*, pp. 114–17.
- 21 P. E. Bennett, 'La Chronique de Jordan Fantosme', pp. 42–53.
- 22 Sarah Kay, 'The nature of Rhetoric in the *chansons de geste*', *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* 94 (1978): 304–20.

- 23 Sophie Marnette, 'Narrateur et point de vue dans les chroniques médiévales', in *The Medieval Chronicle*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1999, p. 178.
- 24 P. E. Bennett, 'La Chronique...', p. 47; *Idem*, 'Some Reflexions on the style of Robert Biket's *Lai du Cor*', *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 94 (1978) : 321-41.
- 25 M. J. Ailes, 'The Anglo-Norman *Boeve de Haumtone* as a *chanson de geste*', in *Bevis of Hampton*, ed. J. Fellows, Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 2008; *Idem*, 'Fierabras and Anglo-Norman Developments of the *chansons de geste*', forthcoming in *Actes of the International Congress of the Société Rencesvals*, Storrs, 2006, ed. Leslie Zarker Morgan and Anne Berthelot.